

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, HO

SUBJECT: CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR'S STATE OF UNION MESSAGE

BEGIN SUMMARY: ON THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 31, CHIEF OF STATE BRIGADIER GENERAL JUAN ALBERTO MELGAR CASTRO GAVE HIS ANNUAL STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS. HIGHLIGHTS OF SPEECH INCLUDE EMPHASIS ON HONESTY AMONG PUBLIC EMPLOYEES, ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CREATION OF COUNCIL MADE UP OF ALL SECTORS TO ADVISE CHIEF OF STATE ON STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN RETURNING TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT AND FREE ELECTIONS, POSSIBLY IN 1979. IT ALSO EMPHASIZED AGRARIAN REFORM AS THE FIRST PRIORITY OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND STRESSED EFFORTS TO EFFECT DEVELOPMENT THROUGH VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS ALREADY CREATED AND PROJECTS TO BE UNDERTAKEN. END SUMMARY.

1. IN HIS STATE OF UNION ADDRESS DELIVERED ON NATIONAL RADIO AND TELEVISION ON DGENING DECEMBER 31, CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR STRONGLY EMPHASIZED NEED FOR HONESTY AMONG PUBLIC EMPLOYEES AND STRINGLY CRITICIZED THOSE EMPLOYEES WHO ARE EXPLOITING THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HUNGER AND MISERY OF THE COUNTRY. HE REFERRED TO DECREE ISSUED

THE PREVIOUS DAY AGAINST ILLEGAL ENRICHMENT BY PUBLIC EMPLOYEES.

2. MELGAR STATED THAT HE WAS CONSCIOUS OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE THE FIRST STEPS TO RETURN THE COUNTRY TO CONSTITUTIONALITY. HE EMPHASIZED THAT CONSTITUTIONALITY SHOULD SIGNIFY MORE THAN A RETURN TO FORMAL DEMOCRACY, BUT RATHER SHOULD ASSURE A TRULY REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT. THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAS DECIDED IT IS THE TIME TO BEGIN THE RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY, BUT THAT IT WILL NOT BE A SHORT OR EASY PROCESS. DURING THE MONTH OF JANUARY 1976, THE GOVERNMENT

WILL SEEK THE VIEWS OF ALL SECTORS OF THE SOCIETY TO OBTAIN THEIR ADVICE CONCERNING HOW TO ESTABLISH, THROUGH A TRULY DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, AN ORGANISM ASSURING PARTICIPATION BY ALL. BASED ON THESE CONSULTATIONS, A COUNCIL WILL BE FORMED WITH THE TASK OF DRAFTING AN ELECTORAL LAW TO GOVERN THE SEGRAL STEPS REQUIRED FOR THE RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY. THIS COUNCIL WILL ALSO SERVE TO ADVISE THE CHIEF OF STATE ON ISSUES OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE TO COUNTRY. MELGAR STATED THAT THE ARMED FORCES DO NOT WISH TO SET SPECIFIC DATES FOR THIS PROCESS, I.E., RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY, BUT IN VIEW OF THE DELICACY AND DIFFICULTIES INHERENT IN THE PROCESS HE ESTIMATED THAT THE PROCESS WOULD CULMINATE ABOUT 1979.

3. MELGAR SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF ARMED FORCES IS COMMITTED TO SOCIAL CHANGE THAT WILL IMPROVE THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF THE POOREST HONDURANS. HOWEVER, THIS MUST BE DONE WITHOUT TAKING AWAY FROM THOSE WHO HAVE MANAGED TO IMPROVE THEMSELVES. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ARMED FORCES OFFERED PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION TO ALL SECTORS, BUT WILL ALSO MAINTAIN ORDER AND DEMAND RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY.

4. MELGAR SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS ESTIMATED THE BASIS FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE DESIRED BY ALL HONDURANS WITHOUT HAVING RESORTED TO VIOLENCE OR EXTREMISM, AND HAS INCORPORATED THOUSANDS OF PEASANTS INTO THE NATIONAL ECONOMY BY LAND REFORM, RECOVERED CONTROL OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND TERMINATED THE BANANA COMPANY CONCESSIONS. HE COMMENTED THAT, HAVING ESTABLISHED THE BASIS FOR DEVELOPMENT, IT IS NOW NECESSARY TO CONSOLIDATE THE ADVANCES THAT HAVE BEEN MADE AND INSTITUTIONS CREATED AND WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEIR SUPPORT START THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW HONDURAS. HE REMARKED THAT THE FULFILLMENT OF THE TASK WILL BE A JOB OF GENERATIONS. HE STATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL ATTEMPT TO INCREASE PRODUCTION, PARTICULARLY THAT FOR EXPORT, CONSOLIDATE AND ENLARGE AGRARIAN REFORM, UNDERTAKE THE HYDRO-ELECTRIC PROJECT AT EL CAJON, IMPLEMENT THE PULP AND PAPER PROJECT AND FURTHER THE TOURIST PROJECT AT TORNASAL. HE STRESSED THAT DEVELOPMENT WILL CONTINUE TO DEPEND HEAVILY ON FOREIGN CAPITAL.

5. HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT CONFIRMS ITS DECISION TO IMPLEMENT AGRARIAN REFORM, WHICH IS GIVEN THE HIGHEST PRIORITY WITHIN THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN. THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN THE AGRARIAN FIELD IS ABOVE ALL TO CONTINUE, BUT NOT IN SUCH A WAY AS TO DESTROY OR PARALYZE PRODUCTIVE UNITS IN THE COUNTRY. HE ASSURED BUSINESSMEN AND INVESTORS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL GIVE ALL POSSIBLE GUARANTEES TO PRIVATE PROPERTY, SO LONG AS IT IS FULFILLING ITS SOCIAL FUNCTION.

6 HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION OF THE COUNTRY IS OBSOLETE, RIGID AND OVER-CENTRALIZED. COMMENTED THAT THE ORGANIZATION SHOULD BE REFORMED SO THAT IT CAN MAKE RAPID DECISIONS WHEN NECESSARY WITHOUT LOSING UNITY AND CONTROL.

7. FOLLOWING CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR'S ADDRESS, CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, BRIGADIER GENERAL POLICARPO PAZ GARCIA, ALSO ADDRESSED THE NATION. HIS SPEECH ESSENTIALLY CONFIRMED THE ARMED FORCES SUPPORT FOR CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR AND THE PLAN OF ACTION HE HAD PREVIOUSLY SET FORTH.

8. BEGIN COMMENT: THE MAJOR POINT OF MELGAR'S SPEECH WAS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STRUCTURE WITHIN WHICH HONDURAS COULD RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT IN THREE TO FOUR YEARS. MELGAR AND THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY ATTACKED BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR FOR THE CONTINUANCE OF AN UNCONSTITUTIONAL REGIME. THE SLOGAN OF THE PARTIES HAS ALWAYS BEEN "AN IMMEDIATE RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT." A NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAVE TOLD MISSION OFFICERS THAT THE ARMED FORCES DO NOT WANT TO REMAIN IN POWER INDEFINITELY. THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAS OBVIOUSLY DECIDED THAT IT WOULD BE BEST TO ESTABLISH A STRUCTURE AND A GENERAL DATE FOR FREE ELECTIONS TO BLUNT CRITICISM. HOWEVER, THE COUNCIL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAS GIVEN ITSELF THREE TO FOUR YEARS TO CARRY FORWARD THE REFORMS INSTITUTED BY THE LOPEZ AND MELGAR GOVERNMENTS. IN ADDITION, MELGAR STATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD LISTEN TO THE ADVICE OF THE NEW ADVISORY COUNCIL IN REGARD TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW ELECTORAL LAW AND THE SETTING OF EXACT ELECTION DATES. THEREFORE, THE GOVERNMENT CAN POINT TO THE GENERAL PROMISE OF ELECTIONS AS A REPLY TO CRITICISM WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ENJOYING THE FLEXIBILITY INHERENT IN NOT HAVING ESTABLISHED SPECIFIC ELECTION DATES.

9. THE OTHER POINTS OF THE SPEECH WERE WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED. BASICALLY, IT IS A STATEMENT THAT THE REGIME WILL CONTINUE TO CARRY OUT SOCIO-ECONOMIC REFORMS, BUT THAT IT WOULD PROCEED ACCORDING TO THE LAW. HE MADE IT PLAIN THAT THE REGIME INTENDS TO PROCEED WITH THE CONTROVERSIAL AGRARIAN REFORM BUT

AT THE SAME TIME ATTEMPTED TO CALM THE FEARS OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC INVESTORS AND BUSINESSMEN.

10 GENERAL PAZ' SPEECH WAS SHORT AND CONTAINED LITTLE OF SUBSTANCE. ITS MAIN INTENTION WAS TO CLEARLY THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE SOLIDLY BEHIND THE MELGAR GOVERNMENT AND ITS PROGRAMS. SINCE PAZ IS THE COMMANDER OF THE ARMED FORCES, HE WAS THE OBVIOUS CANDIDATE TO MAKE SUCH A SPEECH. END COMMENT.
SANCHEZ

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